

# An outline for including refugees in Canadian educational policy

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*Abstract: In late 2015, Canada's newly elected Liberal government committed to resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of the year. In response, provincial and municipal governments began efforts to resettle large numbers of refugees in a short amount of time. This article explores literature related to refugee students in Canada, with the aim to understand best practices and current challenges in educational policy dedicated to refugee students. The study is grounded in Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) argument that dominant norms and values are reproduced through education. Based on a review of the literature, I provide and discuss a list of themes and subthemes related to refugee students and education. These themes are important to acknowledge so that policy dedicated to helping refugee students interrupts the norms and values of the dominant class of society that have previously marginalized refugee students in the education system. The outline developed through this review of literature may be useful in guiding policy and related practice in order to be more responsive to refugee students' diverse needs.*

*Keywords: Refugee, Refugee Students, Educational Policy, Bourdieu, Immigration*

## Introduction

The Syrian refugee crisis dominated debates leading up to Canada's 2015 federal election. Prior to the 2015 election, Stephen Harper's majority government implemented a series of Bills that constructed refugees as likely abusers of Canada's social welfare system, including Bill C-31: Protecting Canada's Immigration System (2012), and Bill C-24: Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act (2014). As well, new policies reduced the number of reviews a refugee claim underwent from three to one. This left the fate of refugee determination up to one reviewer, with no opportunity for refugee claimants to resubmit failed claims or claims that were missing information (Bill C-11: Balanced Refugee Reform Act, 2011). The controversial Bill C-51: Anti-terrorism Act (2015), restricted people's access to basic rights, such as the right to legal aid in the event of being suspected of terrorism; this legislation was unfavourably targeted at refugees. The government of Canada uses the same definition of what constitutes a refugee as the United Nations Convention on refugees, noting that "Refugees are people who have fled their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution, and who are therefore unable to return home. Many refugees come from war-torn countries and have seen or experienced unthinkable horrors" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016a). Unlike other classifications of immigrants, refugees do not choose to leave their home country, but rather are forced to leave.

Following the federal election, the Liberal Party's majority government began to shift Canada's stance on refugees to be more welcoming, and the Party has taken steps to limit the scope of previous Bills targeted at refugees. This includes Bill C-51, which is to undergo statutory review in three years. The Liberal government made a formal commitment to resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2015, and ended up reaching this goal by February 2016. They prioritized settling women, and families with children (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016b). Government organizations, community organizations, and individuals worked to stockpile resources, funding, and housing for the influx of Syrian refugees (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016c). Educational policy development has not kept pace with the rapid resettlement efforts, and school systems across the country lack guidance in assisting refugee students. Policy guidance is also needed for individual teachers, who want more information on how they can personally support refugee students (MacNevin, 2012; Shakya et al., 2010). Before an effective policy to support refugee students can be developed, policy makers need to consult the relevant research, and need to understand successful strategies. While acknowledging these limitations and the urgency for effective educational policy planning for refugees, the guiding research questions for this inquiry are: What recommendations have been made to develop educational policy to support refugee students? What are the existing best practices in developing educational policy to support refugee students? What are the existing challenges in developing educational policy to support refugee students?

## Purpose and Context

The paper shares common practices and identifies challenges in policy dedicated to refugee students. Contextually, it is imperative to note that Canada's federal government determines whether or not refugees gain entrance to the country, and allocates government-sponsored refugees to specific regions (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2016d). In contrast, educational policy is managed at a provincial level. Ministries and departments of education in each province are responsible for developing curriculum, policy, and resources for students and schools in their publicly-funded education systems. To complicate matters, actual responses to refugees will arise at a district school board level and at an individual school level. All of these levels will require preparations to support new refugees in Canadian schools, making guidance through policy a pressing need. In this article, I focus on literature on policy development at the provincial level because this is where school boards, administrators, and teachers look for guidance, best practice, and official policy.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) theory of reproduction in education and society. As part of their theory, Bourdieu and Passeron asserted that schools reproduce the norms and values of the dominant classes in society. Schools engage in language-based activities to determine whether or not one succeeds, and this language typically belongs to the dominant class. In Canada, depending on where you are speaking or writing, the dominant language is English or French. Furthermore, those deemed successful by schools are typically the ones who succeed in the tasks where schools sort and select people, such as standardized testing, and internalizing and performing classroom norms. These tasks are not neutral but rather created for and by the dominant classes in society, so that their privilege and power can be maintained and perpetuated for generations. This theoretical framework was used to engage with current literature that addresses refugee students in Canada, as policy and practice is constructed and maintained by dominant members of society, and refugees are more likely to be recognized as a marginalized population.

## **Methodology**

For this literature review, I followed Punch's (2009) process, which involves the following steps: summarizing, documenting, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing the literature. I first consulted a body of literature that fit with my research questions: What recommendations have been made to develop educational policy to support refugee students? What are the existing best practices in developing educational policy to support refugee students? What are the existing challenges in developing educational policy to support refugee students? I found this literature using the search terms "refugee," "student," "Canada," and "policy" in the Western University Libraries database. I read article abstracts from the search function and identified a collection of 14 Canadian articles based on their relevance to this study. I aimed to include only articles that were published within the last 10 years; however, I included some older articles (e.g. Gunderson, 2000; Schick & St. Denis, 2003) that have been widely cited in this body of literature. After reading each article, I began to implement a coding system by making brief notes in the margins to summarize authors' main points. Some of the resulting codes included: "refugee," "immigrant," "language," "trauma," "resilience," "socio-economic status," "identity," "secondary school," "interrupted schooling," and "hardships in school." I then compiled the most prevalent codes, and those most salient to my research questions, into larger common themes. I revisited these themes three times by re-reading the literature and my codes to ensure reliability.

## **Review of Literature / Findings**

Table 1 (below) provides a summary of the common themes that were drawn out of the coding. When studies were initially coded, several of the studies had codes that eventually contributed to more than one theme or subtheme. To speak to the commonalities and divergences among the studies, this article review is organized by theme. The intersections between the studies are explored in detail as they work to explain the complex interrelations of refugee students, Canadian education, and the policies that address them.

Table 1: Themes in literature related to refugee students in Canada

<b>Foundational Themes</b>	
Distinction as a refugee	Dei & Rummens, 2010; Hajdukowski-Ahmed 2008; Kanu, 2008; MacNevin, 2012; Pillay & Asadi, 2012; Shakya et al., 2010; Valenta, 2010
Using an asset approach	Dei & Rummens, 2010; Hajdukowski-Ahmed 2008; MacNevin, 2012; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Stermac, Elgie, Dunlap, & Kelly, 2010
<b>Additional Themes</b>	
Promoting academic success	Boyd, 2002; Stermac et al., 2010; Shakya et al., 2010
<i>Subtheme: Language learning</i>	Bourdieu & Passeron 1990; Gunderson, 2000; MacNevin, 2012
<i>Subtheme: Refugee students experiencing academic barriers</i>	Kanu, 2008; MacNevin, 2012
Recognizing identity issues	Dei & Rummens, 2010; Gunderson, 2000; Hajdukowski-Ahmed 2008; MacNevin, 2012; Valenta, 2010
<i>Subtheme: Discrimination</i>	Shakya et al., 2010
Recognizing power imbalances	Gunderson, 2000; Kanu, 2008; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Schick & St. Denis, 2003
Considerations at the individual level	Kanu, 2008; MacNevin, 2012; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009

I now elaborate on the findings related to the themes.

### **Distinction as a Refugee**

Engaging with the discourses present in the literature on refugee youth is necessary in order to determine how refugees have been constructed discursively in Canadian scholarly research articles. In reviewing the literature, I drew on Foucault's (1989) understanding of power relations and the processes by which power is manifested in society and paid careful attention to the ways in which refugee young people's educational strengths and needs were represented, and how current Canadian scholarly research about refugee students intersected (e.g., Kanu, 2008; Valenta, 2010).

When reviewing the literature on youth refugees in Canada, it became important to consider whether refugees were constructed as a distinct group, or were clustered with all immigrants or visible minorities. Shakya et al. (2010) explained that policy and research in Canada has a habit of combining refugees and immigrants, which discounts the specific experiences that refugees may have faced, including their migration history. Because refugees experience unique circumstances, such as being forced to flee, potentially enduring trauma, and resettling in a location that they did not choose (Hajdukowski-Ahmed 2008; Pillay & Asadi, 2012; Valenta, 2010), Gunderson (2000) explained that, "the term *immigrant* is too broad to be particularly useful" (p. 695). Arriving in Canada as an economic immigrant provides a vastly different experience compared to arriving in Canada as a refugee, and these differences play out in the realm of education (Valenta, 2010). Distinguishing clearly between refugees and immigrants or racialized youth (Dei & Rummens, 2010), while still recognizing areas where intersections may occur, such as the experiences of racialized refugee youth, was important in reviewing the studies, and must be considered in developing effective policy for refugee students.

### **Using an Asset Approach**

I also examined whether authors took an asset approach, where refugees are constructed as possessing strengths and having a voice that is heard (e.g., Dei & Rummens, 2015; Hajdukowski-Ahmed 2008; Stermac, Elgie, Dunlap, & Kelly, 2010). Examples of 'hearing voice' included acknowledging the strengths that refugees have in resettling, learning a new language, and contributing to school policy and research. I was cautious in reviewing

studies that constructed refugees from a deficit, helpless, or dependent perspective.<sup>1</sup> Refugees bring their past identities to their host countries and may not experience dependency in various forms (e.g., state dependency, dependency on sponsoring family members, dependency on community resources, and any other perceived form) (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). It is necessary to use an asset approach in the development of educational policy because refugees may already experience marginalization, and deficient discursive constructions may add to this marginalization. Dei and Rummens (2015) explained that “most of all, we need to unfailingly recognize the inherent potential of each learner and ever strive to see this potential fully realized” (p. 1). Refugee students should not be constructed as only victims, and it is important to recognize that they have not all had the same pre-and post-resettlement experiences (Dei & Rummens, 2015). Policy based on essentialization can be misaligned and further perpetuate essentialized stereotypes and misinformation. A benefit to such essentializing is that deficit approaches provide clear rationale for policy to be created; however, policy in this case needs to be more complex and dynamic by recognizing that refugees have many funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) and strengths. The education system needs to make improvements in recognizing these funds of knowledge while also responding to areas in which refugee students may need more support. MacNevin (2012) noted that “building on students’ prior experiences and knowledge is important for learning” (p. 59). Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) argued that refugee youth are in a position to make meaningful contributions to Canada, and are therefore an asset. It is paramount that policy makers and teachers adopt an asset perspective while being critical of constructing essentialized understandings of refugee youth. If the dominant society continues to essentialize the experiences of refugees, application of educational policy is likely to follow suit as it has in immigration policy, where seemingly neutral policies have led to refugee women needing to essentialize their stories to border service agents to be seen only as victims to increase their chances of a successful claim (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). Just as societal norms can influence the development and application of policy, policy can influence practice. Often, refugees’ actual needs could be overlooked in favour of responding to their perceived needs. For example, not every refugee needs to learn English, and of those who do not speak English, not every refugee will prioritize language learning the way that schools do. It is important that policy dedicated to refugee students avoids essentializing students, and reminds those who work with refugee students to avoid essentialization based on their own personal bias.

### **Promoting Academic Success**

Refugee students’ educational trajectories in Canada are difficult to capture because it is a challenge to define the scope of what being ‘successful’ in Canadian schools entails. Common considerations for criteria of academic success might include: academic achievements, attitudes towards school, labour market outcomes, and future income attainment. Shakya et al. (2010) interviewed refugee youth in Toronto, Ontario and found that the majority of their respondents saw great value in having high grades in Canadian schools. These students reported that they had a desire to pursue postsecondary education as they saw it as necessary to obtain employment. Despite several barriers to their education (e.g., lack of time spent in Ontario schools, language barriers, racism), Shakya et al. (2010) also noted that refugee students relied on one another as well as on other friends to provide the support necessary to excel in school.

Stermac, Elgie, Dunlap and Kelly’s (2010) study of 15 year olds across Canada explored educational engagement and achievement of students who had experienced war in their home countries. The study did not state whether or not these students were refugees specifically, but many of the participants may have had similar experiences to some refugees, such as living in an unstable country, fearing for their lives, and seeking a new place to live as a result. In the researchers’ focus on participants’ academic achievements, they found that students from war-zone areas were achieving as well as Canadian born students in language and science and they surpassed Canadian born students in mathematics. Stermac et al. noted that the average time that respondents had spent in Canada was 7.8 years, and so for the purposes of this review, it is important to consider that the immediate educational attainment and resettlement difficulties were not captured. With regards to engagement, Stermac et al. found that students from war zone countries had higher levels of school engagement (completing assignments, attendance, attitudes about learning, etc.), which they note could be attributed to higher grades.

As a result of Stermac et al.’s (2010) findings, policymakers should note that time spent in Canada should be considered when understanding and working with refugee student engagement. At the school level, policies should provide the necessary supports and opportunities for academic success. For example, Stermac et al.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Feurverger (2011). Although some examples of a deficit approach are visible in Stermac, Elgie, Dunlap, and Kelly (2010), at many times they use an asset approach, so the article was included.

suggested that schools foster the social connections of students immigrating from war-zone areas, because social connections are beneficial for their academic success and school engagement. The findings of Stermac et al. should be considered with caution, however, as not all students who are refugees may have the time necessary to succeed academically in Canada. For example, Boyd's (2002) study of Canadian immigrants showed that when students immigrate after the age of 15, they experience lower school achievement. Like Stermac et al., Boyd did not look at refugees specifically, but noted that refugee status may be a likely reason why young people who immigrated after age 15 tend to experience lower school achievement. Policy dedicated to refugee students should note that the age at which students enter the school system in Canada may have an impact on their academic success, because students beginning in secondary school have less time to build that success. By drawing attention to the shortened time that older refugee students have to achieve success in the school system, policy would remind secondary school administrators and teachers of the crucial and urgent role they could play in facilitating student adjustment to support success.

**Language learning.** Some researchers (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; MacNevin, 2012) have noted that basic language skills in the national language(s) of a country are necessary for student achievement and engagement in the school. MacNevin explored how teachers learned about and taught refugee students on Prince Edward Island through interviews with seven teachers (classroom and language itinerant) who worked with refugee students. The teachers' interview responses indicated that teachers are challenged with "how to work with students who have experienced trauma" (MacNevin, 2012, p. 57). MacNevin (2012) found that one of the barriers to promoting refugee students' participation in mainstream classes is that typical language instructional models assume that students are proficient in literacy skills in their first language. However, some refugee students may have experienced interrupted schooling. English and French language teachers struggle to teach beginner literacy skills, especially to intermediate and senior students who require age-appropriate materials to remain engaged in the process (MacNevin, 2012). MacNevin's study explained that teachers were looking for more strategies and professional development targeted at teaching basic literacy (as opposed to secondary school level content) to secondary students. Because schools are heavily focused on literacy-based activities, policies and teacher training for refugee students must adequately address language learning.

Gunderson (2000) explored English language learning with refugee students in Canada and found that many secondary teachers were not able to respond to the language, learning, and social needs of their refugee students. The study explained that 60% of the students in the research sample wanted to attend postsecondary institutions, and many of these students saw the value in taking English classes in secondary school to further their language abilities. However, Gunderson also noted that the refugee students who had higher socioeconomic statuses—who are drawn towards postsecondary professional degree programs, such as law and medicine—viewed English language classes as an impediment to their goals and to the time they needed to devote to other academic classes. In some cases, students felt that they should be given the option to take language courses on their own time after they had received the secondary school credits they desired.

**Refugee students experiencing academic barriers.** Kanu's (2008) study about refugee secondary school students in Manitoba revealed a number of barriers that refugee students experience in terms of their academics. The study gathered perspectives from community members, parents, teachers, and youth, and explored areas where intervention can be implemented to better support refugee students. Refugee students were concerned with academic success in terms of a "lack of academic support," "separation from family," "cultural dissonance," "acculturation stress," "limited English language proficiency," "academic gaps due to disrupted schooling," "fast-paced curriculum," "fear and distrust of authority figures like teachers," "fear of speaking out in class," and "grade placement based on age and English language assessment tests rather than academic ability" (pp. 923–924). Many of the barriers presented in Kanu's study can be mitigated by school personnel, and through better educational policy that recognizes these areas of concern. Policy should address students' concerns, such as the fast-paced curriculum and inappropriate grade placement, so that schools and teachers are aware that these are common and frustrating student experiences. At the school level, teachers and administrators may then adapt their practices so that refugee students experience fewer barriers that are embedded into the everyday school experience. This includes working to create a welcoming atmosphere, viewing students from an asset perspective, and advocating for students who have been placed in inappropriate grades.

Some of Kanu's findings were echoed by teachers from MacNevin's (2012) study on teaching to and learning from refugee youth, in terms of challenges faced by refugee students and those working with refugee students. MacNevin noted that teachers wanted information on "how to include students from refugee backgrounds in the classroom" (p. 57). This challenge takes into account the identity issues that refugees face, and reveals a desire to respond in a positive way. In MacNevin's study, teachers' wanted to support refugee students, but the policy and resources to carry out that support was missing.

## Recognizing Identity Issues

The need to recognize the role of identity has been consistently present in studies about refugees in Canada (e.g., Gunderson, 2000; Hajdukowski-Ahmed 2008; MacNevin, 2012; Valenta, 2010). Other studies (e.g., Dei & Rummens, 2010; Shakya et al. 2010) have also described the need for refugee students to have opportunities to explore their unique and changing identities. MacNevin's (2012) study highlighted the need for students to have opportunities to explore their identities and work on reconciling competing markers of identity (such as being an academically-driven student and needing to foster a social circle) while going through the process of resettlement. MacNevin also described issues of identity in terms of teachers wanting to know about how to better include students from refugee backgrounds so these students can meaningfully participate in the classroom. Teachers in MacNevin's study wanted to help students foster social connections outside of the classroom, and to help manage students' limited English proficiency and the marginalizing effect it has on refugee students. Relatedly, Gunderson (2000) has explained that refugee youth are

lost in the spaces between various identities; the teenager, the immigrant, the first-language speaker, the individual from the first culture, the individual socializing into a second language and culture, the individual with neither a dominant first or second culture, but not one of either culture. (p. 702)

The Canadian Education Association published findings focused on immigrant, refugee, and racialized students (as reported in Dei & Rummens, 2010). Dei and Rummens emphasized the need to acknowledge students' identities and "address unique needs associated with social location, and understand the sources of their resistance and protest" (2010, p. 1). Dei and Rummens cautioned that a failure to acknowledge students' identities, and to respond to their needs through policy and practice would further oppress and marginalize refugee students. Dei and Rummens argued that it is necessary to engage refugee students' experiences and cultural competencies within the mainstream classroom to support their multiple identities. It is necessary that policy dedicated to refugee students in Canada acknowledges the multiple, and at times conflicting, identities that refugee students manage, and that the stress related to exploring one's identity can interfere with other endeavours, such as schoolwork. In response to MacNevin's concern about fostering connections outside the classroom, policy also needs to recognize that the scope of exploring one's identity and identity reformation can go beyond the classroom and extend to the wider school community. Practitioners guided by such a policy would be better prepared to understand this aspect of refugee students' lives, and thus better prepared to recognize or create meaningful opportunities for identity exploration in their school community.

**Discrimination.** Shakya et al. (2010) described how refugee students' desire to perform well academically in Canada's education systems was at times hindered due to teachers and guidance counsellors placing refugee students in a lower academic stream than what they are capable of (limiting their ability to apply to universities after completing secondary school), and teachers being suspicious of their placement in advanced classes. This was typically related to refugee students' language skills, rather than their academic abilities. Nevertheless, refugee students turned to friends, and adopted their own strategies to persevere to meet their educational goals, such as asking questions until answers were received. In Shakya et al.'s study, refugee students talked about being perceived as less able to handle academic work than they really were. This translated into dire outcomes for students who were placed inappropriately in the applied stream of study. To gain entrance to university, they had to re-take much of secondary school in the academic stream.

## Recognizing Power Imbalances

A theme that ran through much of the literature (e.g., Gunderson, 2000; Kanu, 2008; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009) was the need to recognize and reduce power imbalances in policy and practice. Schick and St. Denis (2003) studied oppressive and privileged attitudes in Canadian pre-service teachers, noting that pre-service teachers tend to deny the power and privilege they hold in the school system. Teachers are agents of social reproduction, and are in a position to reproduce norms that privilege some and marginalize others, including refugee students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Therefore, teachers should acknowledge their power in an effort to work to reduce oppressive actions. Gunderson (2000) also made this point about the power that teachers hold, noting "teachers must be critical of their own cultural biases" (p. 705). Any policy written for a school-aged population needs to make these cultural, racial, and ethnic imbalances in power explicitly known in terms of how the policy is constructed, recognizing that it is made from an outsider perspective. As well, policy needs to acknowledge that there is a need to work to reduce power imbalances in interactions with refugee students.

Kanu's (2008) study in urban Manitoba (described above) suggested that many refugee secondary students distrusted authority figures in their schools. These students did not feel that their grade placements were appropriate in the sense that they were placed into programs below their capabilities, and they did not feel that they had a venue to voice their objections or be heard by decision makers, including administration. Kanu's findings become especially important to consider when turning to work by Rossiter and Rossiter (2009), who explained that the "development of positive relationships with caring adults in the school setting" (p. 422) is important in protecting refugee young people's identities and sense of belonging. Rossiter and Rossiter noted that positive relationships with adults in schools can be beneficial to refugee students, but Kanu also explained that refugee students are likely to distrust authority figures. To respond to the gap between these two findings, policy needs to encourage those who work with refugee students to acknowledge the power they have, work to foster trust among students, and respond to the needs of refugee students by developing a positive relationship with them.

### **Considerations at the Individual Level**

Many of the studies reviewed in this article (e.g., Kanu, 2008; MacNevin, 2012; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009) explained that although refugee students are likely to have many common experiences (such as being forced to migrate, potentially speaking a different language, working through identity conflicts, and adjusting to a new school system overall), policy also needs to account for students on a more individual level. Without accounting for individual students' needs, experiences, and strengths, policy implementation will have limited positive effects. Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) spoke with community stakeholders including educators who highlighted "the role of individual resilience and the capacity of immigrant and refugee youth to succeed in the face of adversity" (p. 425) as an important consideration when working with many refugee students. Rossiter and Rossiter argued that school is an arena that can interrupt a student's trajectory towards anti-social behaviour and propel a student towards pro-social behaviour (e.g., doing well in school; contributing to the wider community). It is necessary for schools to respond and take an active stance towards working with refugee students. To effectively support refugee students, Rossiter and Rossiter suggest that funding should be allocated to healthcare personnel and "cultural brokers": those who use their combined knowledge of the dominant Canadian culture and of a culture shared by an immigrant or refugee, to help immigrants and refugees navigate the complexities associated with cultural differences in the resettlement process such as language barriers and understanding cultural norms. With regard to teachers being better able to support refugee students, MacNevin (2012) explained that teachers who work with refugee students wanted "information regarding [refugee] students' educational backgrounds" (p. 58) and they wanted this information from "a more objective perspective" (p. 57). The teachers explained that they did not know enough specific information about what refugee students had already learned, or how they learned from reliable sources. Any policy recommendations should acknowledge the time teachers need to meet with reception and placement offices so they can gain a deeper understanding of incoming refugee students.

Finally, Kanu (2008) noted that practical changes need to be made at the individual level and policy changes need to be made in the macrosystem (such as the provincial ministries of education) to support refugee learners. In Kanu's study, references were made to the school board level in terms of beginning interventions and teacher support for working with refugee students, but the only reference to the ministry level (and therefore, the policy level operating within the macrosystem) was regarding more funding for such interventions. Given that the academic success of refugee students is becoming a greater topic of concern among school boards and individual schools, ministries and departments of education should develop policy about including and supporting refugee students rather than just directing funds to individual school boards to develop their own policies. Findings across the literature reviewed in this article suggest that considerations at the individual level are necessary when creating policy dedicated to refugee students. If refugee students are to be successful in their educational trajectories, they need teachers who can effectively work with them, and part of this effectiveness comes from understanding students as individual learners.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

As refugee students continue to resettle in Canada and as schools continue to work with refugee students on a daily basis, there needs to be guidance from provincial educational across Canada. These guiding policies must ensure that refugee students do not remain a marginalized population in schools, which are sites that reproduce the norms and values of the dominant in society. Meaningful policy based on Canadian educational research may

be useful in interrupting this pattern of power so that Canada's continued intake of refugees can be responsive to the academic strengths and needs that refugee students have. Future policy should: include specific distinctions for refugee students' needs; use an asset approach; promote academic success, support language learning and recognize academic barriers; recognize identity issues, including instances of discrimination; recognize power imbalances; and consider students at the individual level. At the local level, policy based on this outline would engage teachers and school staff in a conceptual shift towards interrupting current misinformed understandings of refugee students. Teachers and school staff could use the proposed outline as a guide to help them prevent marginalizing refugee students. For example, placing refugee students in appropriate grades and appropriate academic streams rather than assuming they are low-achieving because of a language barrier, and slowing the pace of the curriculum to meet the educational needs of refugee students, are two concrete ways schools could begin this process of preventing marginalization. The literature suggests that the foundational themes in this outline (e.g., distinguishing refugees' needs from other marginalized groups of students and using an asset approach) highlight the challenges associated with developing policy to support refugee students. As MacNevin (2012) and Shakya et al. (2010) explained, there is a lack of policy dedicated to refugee students. Despite criticisms in the literature, deficit approaches are still common when conceptualizing refugee students. If Canada is going to live up to its commitment to "resettle" increased numbers of refugees with a focus on families, women, and children, the resettlement effort needs to be long term and must include key stakeholders, including the education system. The outline proposed in this article has potential to inspire meaningful changes through educational policy and related practices so that the social and academic marginalization of refugee students can be interrupted.

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